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*The Iban Dairies of Monica Freeman 1949-1951.  
Including Ethnographical Drawings, Sketches,  
Paintings, Photographs and Letters, Laura P. Appell-  
Warren (ed.)*

Philipps: Borneo Research Council, monographs series n° 11, 2009, XLII + 643 p., glossary, appendix, biblio-graphy, illustrations (maps, figures and color plates)

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***The Iban Dairies of Monica Freeman 1949-1951. Including ethnographical drawings, sketches, paintings, photographs and letters***, Laura P. Appell-Warren (ed.), Philipps: Borneo Research Council, monographs series n° 11, 2009, XLII + 643 p., glossary, appendix, bibliography, illustrations (maps, figures and color plates).

*By Antonio Guerreiro \**

Few anthropologists have yet published their field dairies; until now Malinowski's dairy is considered as one of the most fascinating piece of ethnographical writing. Monica Freeman's dairies document the Freemans' long Iban fieldwork in Sarawak (June 1949-May 1951), at the time a Crown colony (the State joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963). This book is a welcome addition to both Anthropological literature and Iban Studies.

Derek Freeman (1916-2001), coming originally from New Zealand, had just completed a thesis on Samoan social structure (1948) at London University, under the supervision of Professor Raymond Firth. He was selected to include the team of anthropologists who were to engage in field research in Sarawak, following the pioneering report of Edmund R. Leach<sup>1</sup>. According to Leach's conclusions, the top priority projects included the Iban's shifting cultivation system, the urban and rural Chinese, the Melanau (A Liko) sago production, and the Bidayuh or "Land Dayak" socioeconomic variables. As Freeman had begun to learn Iban language while in London, he was given the two year Iban project. Monica Freeman came from England to meet her husband, who had arrived in Sarawak in January 1949. He started fieldwork in the longhouse community of *rumah* Nyala. The longhouse was located on the Sungai Sut, a tributary of the Batang Baleh, upriver from the town of Kapit. A separate house, connected to the open platform (*tanju*) of the longhouse main building was built before Monica's arrival. After returning to England, the Freemans spent two years at Cambridge. Derek wrote his report on *Iban Agriculture* for the Colonial Office and worked on his Ph.D dissertation

under Leach's supervision at Cambridge's University Department of Anthropology<sup>2</sup>.

While in the field, at the end of 1949, Derek Freeman decided to concentrate on his ethnographical and ethnogical notes while Monica was to write the fieldwork's dairies. Although she had no formal training in art, she made beautiful and very detailed ethnographic drawings, sketches and paintings. In the course of fieldwork she developed her own style of sketching, quite different from the basic ethnographic drawing. Derek Freeman assigned her the task of systematically drawing Iban longhouse life, she became an "official artist" as she put it. Some paintings were made later when the Freemans were living in Australia. A number of drawings do portray Iban individuals with much talent. M. Freeman's hand-written dairies were first transcribed in Australia by a typist and prepared for publication. However, the book project did not materialize. In the meanwhile, the Borneo Research Council publication project was launched. Monica Freeman's letters to her mother were added to the volume, giving a much more accurate and lively account of the days spent in the field. The editor, Laura P. Appell-Warren, a noted anthropologist specialized in Malaysian Borneo, has been instrumental in expanding the scope of the book. She added information in footnotes and in her preface to the volume. A host of Iban scholars have also contributed precisions to the editor. The letters have been integrated chronologically to the dairies as the illustrations' (Monica's drawings, sketches and photographs), which prove very effective in recreating both the anthropologists' longhouse life in Sungai Sut and the conditions of Sarawak at the time. The dairies do span a long period, starting from Monica's arrival at Sibu in June 1949 to June 1951, when she left for England with Derek from Singapore aboard the *Ulysses*. In the dairies and the letters, Monica, refers affectionately to Derek as *Bec*, while she signed her letters to her mother by the nickname *Moc*.

The structure of the book is practically organised, after a comprehensive introduction by Monica Freeman—touching such topics as cash crops cultivation, presence of logging companies, the *penghulu* system,

the *bejalai* practice, Iban *adat* law–, and the editor's preface, it presents the full text of Monica's dairies, numbered 1 to 6 (1-608). The letters she wrote to her mother while in the field and in town, and the many drawings and B&W photographs, are well integrated into the text, while the colour plates (41) are collected at the centre of the volume (in fact these are also duplicated in B&W in the main text). The book reads fairly well, and it is a mine of ethnographic details, focussing on the Iban lifestyle in the early 1950s. The bulk of the sketches, B&W photographs and paintings (141 in all), done by Monica's have been included in the text. Besides, three maps, 2 figures and additional photographs (5) being part of the introduction. A comprehensive glossary (611-632) provides the most important Baleh Iban words and concepts mentioned in the text and the letters, with comparisons from the Sutlives' *Handy Reference Dictionary of Iban and English* (1994) and A. J. N. Richard's *Iban-English Dictionary* (1981). The appendix lists all Monica's drawings, some were published before as illustrations in Derek Freeman's articles and books (633-640).

The Freemans' base during fieldwork was *rumah* Nyala, situated a little distance upstream of Kapit, but they did stay in other Iban communities as well : upriver on the right hand tributaries of the Baleh, at *rumah* Sibat (sungai Tiau) and *rumah* Tungku, on the *sungai* Melinau (Iban longhouses are named after the headman's or *tuai rumah* name). It should be noted that the volume gives a precise picture of the Baleh Iban society, before important social and cultural changes took place in the mid-1960s. Elements of material culture are particularly well represented in the drawings (tools, tatoo (*ukir*) and *ikat* patterns, wall paintings, architecture, carvings, weaving...). However, Monica's detailed notes restate also the social dynamics of the Iban household (*bilek*), the basic social unit–*bilek* meaning "apartment" or "room"–, against the background of gender, kinship, and especially kindred relationships (*kaban*) in the longhouse. The Iban ritual and customary law (*adat*) is considered through everyday activities in the communities studied: mee-

tings, swidden rice farming, feasting (*gawai*), various ritual practices, dreams and beliefs. The oral literature of the Iban, of whom the bards (*lemambang*) and shamans (*manang*) are the specialists, was intensely studied by Derek, texts, including *timang* invocations and genealogies of deities, were recorded, transcribed and translated in the longhouses with the help of an educated Iban research assistant, Patrick Ringkai from Bau (1912-2009). Not suprisingly, the dairies describe at length the pauses and leisure during fieldwork (reading magazines and weeklies, waiting for the mail and writing letters, ailments and treatments, cooking, eating, replenishing supplies in the bazaars...) besides transportation to other longhouses or towns on the Rejang or Baleh and its hazards, a leitmotiv in the day to day entries. Significantly Kana, the Freemans' driver, is honored by a photograph (fig. 13, 36). Monica gives the daily entry according to the place she wrote it, i.e. "Rumah" (longhouse) or "Dampa (swidden farm)", followed by the personal name of the individual, in town she indicates Kapit, Kanowit, Sibul, Betong or Kuching. Then Derek's research is well represented by the writing up of notes, interviews, meetings with informants, visits to other longhouses in the Baleh and places in upper Sarawak (the upper Rejang and Baluy area, Simanggang now Sri Aman, Betong and Sungai Paku in the Saribas), documenting Iban social system, *gawai* rituals, farm work and other activities, e. g. *pua'* weaving<sup>3</sup>, *manang* curing rites. Then Monica's adopted pet gibbon was an interesting addition to the Freemans' household, she even took it back to England with them.

The dairies provide a knowledgeable account of the on-going researches taking place in Sarawak at the time, in connection to meetings with such figures as W.R. Geddes and I. Morris. Many Sarawakians, expatriates and visitors are mentioned, such as Reverend B. H. Baughman in Kapit, a Methodist missionary, the D.Os and other Sarawak administrative officers, *inter alia* I. Urquhart, B. Smythies, M. Macdonald–the Colonial Governor in Singapore who was found of Dayak peoples and of the Iban in particular–, T. Harrison in Kuching, besides the main Iban leaders in the

Baleh area, Temenggong Koh, Penghulu Jugah, several noted *tuai rumah*, and too many longhouse folk to be mentioned. In a postscript to the dairies, written in 2008, Monica recalls that her link to Borneo was discontinued—she never went back to Sarawak—but she still had exchanges through correspondence with Jarau, the educated son of Gering anak Semada from *rumah Nyala* (608, see fig. 8, p. 17). Maybe the strong point of the dairies is that they allow the reader to meet and know individual Ibans and their social life more intimately, through the text they are referred by their personal names.

By the sheer amount of ethnographical and historical material on the Iban, and its reflexive approach on the art of fieldwork by a couple including their “feuds” and disagreements, I can guess that the volume will become soon a landmark in Anthropology, and Bornean studies in particular. It is also a complementary volume to the Sutlives’ *Encyclopedia of Iban Studies*<sup>4</sup>. One may add that, in contrast to Derek’s authoritative monographs and articles, written in a rather dry style, Monica’s dairies and letters are full of life and anecdotes. To conclude, a word on the edition of the book which is superb, the quality of reproduction of the color pictures and of the drawings being excellent. Perhaps, the only drawback I could remark would be the lack of an index that would have been much useful (topics, place names/pe zonal names). But it is a minor point, the editor, Ms. Laura P. Appell Warren, should be congratulated for such an important and well designed work.

## Notes

1. While in Sarawak during the year 1947, Leach carried out his survey during several field trips, besides library research, then his report to the Colonial Office, was revised and published in 1950: *Social Science Research in Sarawak*, London, Colonial Research Studies n° 1. Leach had proposed four research projects focussing on the socioeconomic system of the peoples of Sarawak. The so-called “Southern Murut” (i.e. Kelabit, Lun Dayeh and Lun Bawang), were left out to the care of Tom Harrisson, who was engaged in a long term research in the uplands since 1945. Actually Harrisson was to become the

Sarawak Museum curator and Government ethnologist in June 1947 shortly before Leach arrived in Sarawak (Judith M. Heilmann, *The Most Offending Soul Alive. Tom Harrisson and Its Remarkable Life*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997: 246 ff.). Later in 1951-52, the Penan social organization and kinship (Eastern Penan) in the Baram basin were the main topic of Rodney Needham’s field research; his Ph.D dissertation is still unpublished by now.

2. Freeman’s report to the Colonial Social Science Research Office (published in 1955 under the title *Iban Agriculture*, London: HMSO, Colonial Research Studies 18), focussing on the swidden cultivation system, described as “shifting cultivation” at the time, was the top priority, because of the perceived expansion of Iban communities in Sarawak, especially in connection to the high rate of felling of primary forest (see C. Padoch, *Migrations and its Alternatives among the Iban of Sarawak*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1982). The new version was published much later: *Report on the Iban*, London: LSE Monographs on Social Anthropology 41, 1970. While his unpublished Ph.D Thesis (1953) considered specifically the family and kinship system of the Iban. See Guerreiro, A., “Derek Freeman” in *Encyclopédie Philosophique*, Paris: PUF, 1992.
3. Actually Monica did learn to weave a *pua’ kumbu’* textile (shawl or blanket) according to the traditional Iban techniques, including the dyes and the *ikat* process, under the ladies’ guidance at *rumah Nyala*. A photograph of her work is provided in the book, fig. 109, 394; on *ikat* weaving techniques and *pua’* patterns see p. xxxii-xxxiii, also the sketches, figs. 5, 39, 57, 62, 76, 77, 88, 100, 108, 110, 117, 126.
4. Sutlive, Vinson and Joanna (general editors), *Encyclopedia of Iban Studies, Iban History, Society and Culture*, Kuching, Sarawak: The Tun Jugah Foundation, 4 volumes, 2001.

\* Anthropologue spécialiste de Bornéo.